

# VOIP is road to the future

HP networking solutions, Cisco hardware smooth Parts for Trucks' ride



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**PARTSFORTRUCKS**



Running a successful service business requires keeping customers happy. Cutting edge technology can help businesses do just that, eliminating logistical road bumps and turning effective customer service into the smoothest of rides.

Such is the experience of Parts for Trucks, Inc., a heavy-duty truck parts distributor serving the Atlantic region of Canada. With 14 locations, three of which also offer repair services, Parts for Trucks is the market leader in its region. The company owes its success in large part to excellent customer service, which it recently enhanced even further by implementing a state-of-the-art VOIP phone system.

Darryl Batchilder, IT Manager, joined Parts for Trucks five years ago. Technology has changed a great deal in this time period. "When I started, our database was run on a mainframe. Employees accessed parts information over dumb terminals. We replaced this environment with an open architecture WAN comprising an HP L2000 server, seven HP ProLiant DL380 servers and four HP ProLiant DL360 servers, with a mix of HP Compaq Evo Thin Client T20s, HP Compaq t5710 Thin Clients, and Wyse Winterm 9150SE Thin Clients serving on the front end."

The new server infrastructure, Batchilder said, was an important step for Parts for Trucks. "We are now able to provide a stable environment and deliver all required applications to the end user. Our centralized computing model using Citrix for application delivery enables our IT department to manage our infrastructure cost effectively and efficiently."

While the database is critical to the company's business processes, it doesn't completely replace the knowledge accumulated by Parts for Trucks employees. Customers often have questions about Parts for Trucks inventory. Inevitably, some of those questions are about relatively obscure parts and less-popular brands.

Fortunately, the company employs many dedicated staffers. "The majority of our staffers are long-time employees," Batchilder noted. "They're loyal to the industry and loyal to the company. So we have people who are very knowledgeable about our inventory."

The challenge was to make the information residing with individual employees available with the same degree of flexibility and efficiency as the information residing on Parts for Trucks' HP servers.

And at the same time, Parts for Trucks wanted to make other improvements in its customer service capabilities.

#### **When customers come calling**

Having product specifications and other information at the ready is critical. But it's only one link in the customer service chain. Parts for Trucks staffers also had to respond to customer requests and questions quickly and efficiently. Most of these inquiries come by phone. So when Parts for Trucks learned that the manufacturer would no longer support its aging phone system, it naturally began to ask whether improved phone technology would help improve customer service.

One option was to move to a new version of its old dedicated phone system. But Parts for Trucks wanted something better. "Our old system was distributed and difficult to manage," Batchilder said. Centralization became a key part of the spec, he added, because Parts for Trucks serves a large geographic area: offices span 1000 miles across four Canadian provinces. "We wanted a phone system we could manage in-house, but unless we could minimize the need for in-person service calls, we risked excessive maintenance costs, as well as complicated logistical issues."

The company also wanted wireless handhelds for its staff. "We'd added some wireless units to our old phone system, and our employees really loved the flexibility. It was great



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— Paul Raymond, President, Parts for Trucks



to be able to take a phone call from anywhere — from a warehouse, or a service bay, or while sitting on a fork lift.” But the mobility of handhelds makes them relatively vulnerable to breakage. They get banged around; they get dropped. It was important that Parts for Trucks’ new phone system let them replace handhelds easily if needed.

Parts for Trucks knew that one option was VOIP phone technology. But there were concerns about moving too far out on the adoption curve. “We’re not a large company,” said Parts for Trucks President Paul Raymond. “We knew that choosing newer technology is a bit of a gamble.”

To understand and mitigate the risks, Parts for Trucks turned to HP Wireless and Networking consultants to pilot a wireless Cisco IP Communications Solution using Microsoft .NET enterprise technology. “We went with Cisco because the solution was the best fit for us and met our requirements,” Batchilder said. “What HP brought to the process was its expertise as a systems integrator and solutions provider. HP helped us to identify our requirements and worked with Cisco to get the pilot hardware in place. Then they put the system through its paces.”

The pilot helped offset the inherent risk in moving to a relatively new technology: it demonstrated that the VOIP system would work, as intended, to the specific application requirements.

So Parts for Trucks agreed that HP should draft and then help implement a full rollout of the technology. HP’s consultants returned to design, stage, and implement the network components for each of the Parts for Trucks locations; then they worked with the company’s operations group and administrative staff to train them how to use and manage the new phone system.

#### **Faster, smarter, stronger**

The technology has proven to be a smart choice. “We can manage the entire phone system from our main

office,” Batchilder said. “We don’t have to send someone on site to add or reconfigure our phones, or manage features like extensions and voice mailboxes.” If a handset needs to be replaced, a new one is simply shipped to the store that needs it; all set-up is performed remotely.

The system utilizes Parts for Trucks’ existing service provider PSTN lines, but within Parts for Trucks itself, voice traffic moves over the company’s data infrastructure, including switches and routers. Parts for Trucks anticipates that this will help offset the cost of the new system by reducing the complexity of their IT assets and the associated overhead costs. With this solution, the company no longer needs a separate vendor to service its phones.

But the most important benefit of the new system is how it improves Parts for Trucks operations and processes.

“The handsets work throughout our entire building,” said Darin White, Store Manager. “There are no dead zones. We can be pulling inventory from shelves for one customer, while we talk to another, without worrying about losing a connection.”

The phones, White added, are equipped with headsets, so they are truly hands-free. “We don’t have to wedge a phone between a shoulder and an ear if we’re doing something else while we’re talking.” The new system also supports voice mail for every staffer, something not provided by Parts for Trucks’ old phone network.

The new VOIP system allowed Parts for Trucks to make measurable improvements to its customer service as well. Since everyone is equipped with a mobile handset, calls are answered more quickly. The ability to transfer calls to any other employee is also a big plus. “When a customer calls in with detailed questions, the call can be easily transferred to someone with expertise in that area,” Raymond said.

## Challenge

- Good customer service key to maintaining market leadership.
- Manufacturer no longer supporting existing phone system.
- Company spread out over large geographical range.
- Company wanted to reduce phone system overhead, maintenance costs.

## Solution

- VOIP system.
- Cisco IP Communications Solution.
- Microsoft .NET enterprise applications technology.
- HP Wireless and Networking consultants.
- HP support.

## Results

### Simplicity

- Single IT infrastructure for both data and voice communication.
- Fewer vendors (no separate phone system vendor).
- Phone system managed centrally, in-house.
- Customers can reach any location from a single number.

### Agility

- Calls can be transferred seamlessly regardless of employee's location.
- Extensions can be easily rerouted to accommodate staffing fluctuations.

### Value

- Customer calls answered more quickly, improving service.
- No separate voice IT system means reduced overhead.
- Infrastructure can be leveraged to add new capabilities in the future.

## At a glance

**Organization:** Parts for Trucks, Inc.

**Founded:** 1919

**Headquarters:** Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

**Employees:** 230

**Telephone:** 1 800 565 4700

**URL:** [www.partsfortrucks.com](http://www.partsfortrucks.com)

**Primary business:** Parts for Trucks, Inc. is the largest distributor of heavy-duty truck and trailer parts in Atlantic Canada. Its 14 locations include three service repair facilities.

"It doesn't matter where anyone is, physically. We never have to ask a customer to hang up and dial a different number. Anybody who works for us is just a few clicks of a keypad away."

The ability to transfer calls seamlessly is also useful if an employee is on vacation or sick leave. Some of Parts for Trucks' facilities are only lightly staffed, noted Raymond. But thanks to the new VOIP technology, staff can be deployed — virtually — to any facility. "If we find ourselves shorthanded at one store, we just route its calls to a larger one." This means Parts for Trucks can accommodate temporary fluctuations in staffing without disrupting customer service.

Selecting VOIP technology, Raymond added, also positions Parts for Trucks to leverage technology even more in the future. "Merging voice and data systems is the foundation for launching other technology applications, like the ability to automatically display customers' computer records when they phone us." Today, such capabilities are still just a gleam in Raymond's eye. But he's pleased to know that the same VOIP system that is delivering critical benefits today will continue to deliver them in the future. "We wanted to move forward, and we did," he said. "We made the right choice."

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